

Message Text

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S E C R E T DAMASCUS 4631

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PBOR, MOPS, MILI, SY, LE, IS
SUBJ: NON-PAPER ON LEBANON

REF: STATE 203785

1. TUENI'S APPROACH IN HIS NON-PAPER SHOULD BE UNACCEPTABLE
IN MANY RESPECTS TO SYRIA, BUT THERE ARE ASPECTS OF IT,
IF HANDLED CAREFULLY, MIGHT WASH HERE.

2. SPECIFICALLY: A) SYRIA WILL NEVER PUBLICLY ADMIT
ITS FORCES HAVE THE OBLIGATION OF "CONTAINING" THE
PALESTINIANS. THEY WILL CONTINUE TO DO SO, BUT THIS
UNDERTAKING HAS TO BE AN UNWRITTEN OBLIGATION. CLEARLY,
THE PHALANGE AND THE AHRAR WILL NEED SOME KIND OF SYRIAN
COMMITMENT RE THE PALESTINIANS IF THEY ARE TO PLAY
BALL. PERHAPS SOME KIND OF SECRET ORAL SYRIAN UNDERTAKING
COULD BE OBTAINED, ALTHOUGH THIS MIGHT NOT BE ENOUGH TO
SATISFY THEIR ADVERSARIES. ANOTHER DIFFICULTY--FROM
THE SYRIAN VANTAGE POINT--IS THAT IT IS VIRTUALLY
IMPOSSIBLE TO ENFORCE SECRECY AROUND HERE; B) THE MINI-SUMMIT
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 02 DAMASC 04631 121204Z

AND NEW ROLE FOR THE ADF ARE POSSIBILITIES, BUT NOT
IF THE SUMMIT APPEARS TO BE CONVOKED TO "REDEFINE"
SYRIA'S ROLE IN THE ADF. REDEFINITION CAN TOO EASILY
BE CONSTRUED AS ARAB CRITICISM OF SYRIA'S PERFORMANCE.
IN OUR VIEW, IT WOULD BE A PITY TO HAMSTRING THE
COMMENDABLE IDEA OF A MINI-SUMMIT BY COUCHING IT IN
THESE TERMS. BEST WAY TO GET SYRIAN APPROVAL FOR A

MINI-SUMMIT IS TO TELL SYRIANS THAT PARTICIPANTS WOULD CONVENE UNDER SYRIAN AEGIS AND GUIDANCE. C) CHRISTIAN EXTREMIST PARTICIPATION IN A NEW GOVERNMENT, PARTICULARLY THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN CLOSELY ASSOCIATED WITH ISRAEL, WOULD BE A NON-STARTER RIGHT NOW AS FAR AS SYRIA IS CONCERNED. HOWEVER, IT MIGHT BE POSSIBLE TO GET SYRIANS TO BUY MORE MODERATE PHALANGE AND AHRAR LEADERS SUCH AS AMIN GEMAYEL AND DANNY CHAMOUN. A COOLING OFF PERIOD IS NECESSARY, IN ANY CASE. D) SYRIA WELCOMES THE UN ROLE IN THE SOUTH, BUT WOULD STRONGLY OPPOSE ANY UN ACTIVITY IN THE NORTH. FACTFINDING MISSIONS AND UNIFIL OFFICER PARTICIPATION IN THE ADG JUST WON'T WASH. PRESIDENT ASSAD OBJECTS TO INTERNATIONALIZATION OF THE PROBLEM FOR FEAR THAT HE WILL LOSE WHAT LITTLE CONTROL AND LEVERAGE HE HAS OVER THE COURSE OF EVENTS. AS FAR AS HE IS CONCERNED, MORE VOCES IN LEBANON ONLY MAKE MORE PROBLEMS. E) THE SAME ARGUMENT APPLIES TO EXPANDING PARTICIPATION ON THE ADF. WHILE ASSAD MIGHT AGREE TO MODEST INCREASES IN THE TROOPS SUPPLIED BY OTHER CURRENT ARAB DONORS, HE PROBABLY WOULD NOT LIKE THE IDEA OF ADDING NEW NATIONAL CONTINGENTS SUCH AS THE JORDANIANS, WHOSE ENTRY COULD ONLY INFLAME THE REJECTIONIST PALESTINIANS. F) SYRIA MAY NOW SEE ADVANTAGE OF THE LEBANESE ARMY'S ASSUMPTION OF A MORE ACTIVE ROLE IN KEEPING THE PEACE, EVEN IN ITS IMPERFECT CHRISTIAN-DOMINATED FORMAT. THE QUESTION, SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 DAMASC 04631 121204Z

OF COURSE, IS WHETHER THE ARMY IS STRONG ENOUGH TO DO WHAT TUENI SUGGESTS. G) WE WOULD GUESS THAT A FORMAL NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WOULD BE AS HARD TO FORM AS A NEW GOVERNMENT, BUT WE DEFER TO EMBASSY BEIRUT. INFORMAL, PRACTICAL COORDINATING ARRANGEMENTS MIGHT WORK BETTER.

3. GENERALLY, THE SYRIANS HAVE APPROACHED FORMALIZED ANSWERS TO LEBANON'S PROBLEMS SUCH AS FORMING A NEW GOVERNMENT, DRAWING UP A BLUEPRINT FOR A NEW ARMY, ETC. WITH LITTLE FLEXIBILITY. THEY CAN COME TO TERMS MORE EASILY WITH UNDERSTANDINGS THAN AGREEMENTS.

4. TUENI'S LIST IS A GOOD SET OF OBJECTIVES TO WORK FROM, BUT ANY SYRIAN COOPERATION HINGES ON ASSAD'S NOT APPEARING TO BE RENEGING ON HIS PUBLIC COMMITMENTS AND POSITIONS AND THE PRESENTATION OF THE "LEGITIMACY" OF THE SYRIAN ROLE IN LEBANON--A POINT KHADDAM STRESSED HARD IN MY MEETING WITH HIM. PELLETREAU

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